

15. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 10 wherein one of said plurality of switches is a private branch exchange.

16. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 10 wherein one of said plurality of switches is a key telephone system.

#### REMARKS

The Examiner has objected to the claims presently on file under 35 USC s. 102(b) as being anticipated by United States Patent No. 6,195,345 (Kramer). In response, the Applicant has carefully studied the prior art reference and has developed a revised set of claims and firmly submits that the reference fails to provide teachings that would make any one of the claims submitted herewith anticipated on the claim date. The Applicant also provides the following explanations to show the difference between the present invention as defined in the revised claims and the cited prior art:

Kramer (United States Patent No. 6,195,345) describes a communication system which is based on a concept that allows for cost-effectively increasing the performance and capacity of a single messaging node by creating a cluster of nodes that appear, from the network's point of view, to be a single high-capacity system providing single number access.

(col 3, lines 38-45).

The goal of the present invention is to provide a communication system which allows a user to perform communications on a local telephony access node without making a call over the public switched telephone network (PSTN), thereby, minimizing the cost of communication. For instance, in previous systems, when user A tries to contact user B, if B does not answer, and A leaves him a message, user A pays for having his call answered by an automated answer machine and user B pays for retrieving the message

of user A (applicable for long distance calls in North America and local and long distance calls in Europe and other countries). The present invention provides a separate network for message retrieval and storage. Such network connects with the PSTN (or any telecommunication network) through a switch (26) and a node (22).

If one compares Fig.2 which represents a distributed messaging system according to the present invention and Figs.1 and 14 of the Kramer (United States Patent No. 6,195,345) reference which describes a general distribution of the prior art system, it can be concluded that the system of the present invention is different in design and distribution, function, and interconnection of the constituting elements.

Additionally, the words "nodes" and "switches" are very broad terms which can refer to, by the same name, quite different devices having unique functions and structures all having the same name associated.

In particular, as described in Fig.7 and col 7, lines 17-34 of the Kramer, a node 37 is needed to simultaneously communicate with the LNX and back-end 38 to establish and prepare a direct communication between the LNX and one of the back ends through a signaling link 11. Hence, a node according to the Kramer system is a virtual set-up link which prepares the communications between the LNX and the back end and does not pass the information packets through.

In contrast, as described in Fig.2 and pages 5 and 6 of the present application, an incoming message (from the PSTN) will be switched by the switch 26 to the telephony access node 22 (TAN) which records the message and then transfers it to the centralized message store component of the back end cluster 20 via the wide area network 24. The message can be retrieved via the same path, by inverted steps. Thus, the meaning and function of node according to the system of the present invention are different than those of the Kramer (United States Patent No. 6,195,345 ) reference.

Based on the preceding, and regarding the Examiner's rejection of the main claims 1 and 9, upon which the remaining claims depend, the Applicant firmly submits that the system and method described in these claims are inventive and patentable over the cited reference since the meanings and functions of the constitutional elements are different.

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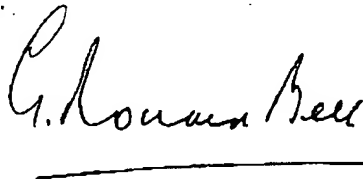
The Examiner's rejection of the remaining claims is believed to be overcome considering the fact that claims 2 to 8 depend on claim 1 and claims 10 to 16 depend on claim 9. Accordingly, reconsideration of the matter is respectfully requested.

The Applicant respectfully submits that the amended claims overcome all of the rejections outlined in the outstanding Office Action.

It is believed that the application is now in condition for allowance and early action in that respect is courteously solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

By:



A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "G. Ronald Bell", is written over a horizontal line.

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